

Phil Gramm
Texas

MM 99-360

ORIGINAL

United States Senate

MEMORANDUM
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Date: FEB 10 2000

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Federal Communications Commission

Office of Congressional Affairs

1919 M Street, NW

Washington, DC 20554

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

A constituent has sent the enclosed communication. A response which addresses his/her concerns would be appreciated.

Please send your response, together with the constituent's correspondence, to the following address:

Office of Senator Phil Gramm
2323 Bryan Street, #2150
Dallas, Texas 75201

Attention: Charles Porter
(214) 767-3107
(214) 767-8754 (fax)

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Author: Phil Gramm@gramm.senate.gov at Internet

Date: 1/30/00 6:17 PM

Subject: People for Better TV

Karen Kapusta-Pofahl
500 Audra Lane Apt. C
Denton, TX 76201-6495

Chairman William E. Kennard
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

FEB 04 2000

Dear Chairman Kennard:

I believe the airwaves are a public trust and I want to know that the public has been consulted before those airwaves are given away. No one has asked me how TV can better serve me or my family.

I understand that television broadcasters in major cities across the United States will begin using additional public airwaves to broadcast digital television signals on May 1, 1999. I am sure that digital broadcasting will offer many opportunities, but I want to know what responsibilities broadcasters will perform in exchange for the free use of the airwaves.

Please begin a proceeding immediately to consider what people like me can expect in return for giving away such valuable public resources to the broadcasters.

Television plays an important and powerful role in my community, and like many Americans I am concerned about the amount of sex and violence on television, the number of commercials during children's programming, the lack of local programming addressing the needs of my community, and the lack of programming accessible to the disabled.

Sincerely,

Karen Kapusta-Pofahl

CC:

Representative William M. (Mac) Thornberry
Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison
Senator Phil Gramm



NEWS

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20554

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 15, 1999

News Media contact:
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FCC BEGINS PROCEEDING TO SEEK COMMENT ON PUBLIC INTEREST OBLIGATIONS OF TELEVISION BROADCASTERS AS THEY TRANSITION TO DIGITAL TRANSMISSION TECHNOLOGY

Washington -The FCC today opened a proceeding to solicit comment on the public interest obligations of TV broadcasters as they transition to digital transmission technology.

In adopting a Notice of Inquiry (NOI), the Commission said it was creating a forum for public debate on how broadcasters can best serve the public interest during and after this transition. The Commission said it is not proposing new rules or policies in this NOI, but rather is seeking ideas and public comment to determine what, if any, further steps should be taken in this area.

The NOI follows up on the FCC's April 1997 digital television (DTV) order in which it indicated it would issue a Notice at a later date on the public interest obligations of DTV broadcasters. The NOI also seeks comment on some recommendations of the President's Advisory Committee on the Public Interest Obligations of Digital Broadcasters, and on some ideas contained in petitions filed by outside parties, including People for Better TV, asking for the FCC to commence a proceeding on this subject.

The Commission asked for comment on four general categories of issues:

- (1) the application of television stations' public interest obligations to the new flexibility and capabilities of digital television, such as multiple channel transmission;
- (2) how television stations could best serve their communities in terms of providing their viewers information on their public interest activities, and using digital technology to provide emergency information in new ways;
- (3) how DTV broadcasters could increase access to television programming by people with disabilities, and further the longstanding legislative and regulatory goals of diversity; and
- (4) whether broadcasters could enhance the quality of political discourse through uses of the airwaves for political issues and debate.

Digital: In the area of challenges unique to the digital era, the Commission asked for comment on how broadcasters' existing public interest obligations should be applied in a digital television environment. It cited the existing obligation to air children's informational and educational programming, and asked for comment on how to apply this guideline when broadcasters offer more than one programming stream through DTV multiplexing. It asked for comment on what, if any, public interest obligations should apply to the use of a DTV broadcaster's channel to provide ancillary and supplementary services, such as datacasting.

Disaster: In the area of broadcasters responding to their communities, the Commission asked for comment on the opportunity created by digital technology to allow more pinpointing of emergency warnings, such as targeting specific households or neighborhoods at risk, and thus to provide improved disaster warnings. The NOI also asked for comment on ideas for requiring enhanced disclosures of stations' public interest programming and activities, and on suggestions that broadcasters use Internet postings and electronic mail in making available their public files.

Disability & Diversity: In the area of enhancing access to the media, the Commission asked for comment on how broadcasters might make their programming more accessible to persons with disabilities, such as enabling viewers to change the size of captions or to make video description more widely available. The Commission also asked for comment and suggestions on innovative ways unique to DTV to encourage diversity in the digital era.

Discourse: In the area of enhancing political discourse, the Commission asked for comment on ways that candidate access to television could be improved, and on whether the FCC can take steps to promote voluntary efforts by broadcasters. The NOI also asked for comment on the Advisory Committee recommendations that broadcasters voluntarily provide five minutes of time each night for thirty days before an election for candidate-centered discourse. It also asked for comment on proposals by individual members of the Advisory Committee and others to require broadcasters to provide designated amounts of airtime for national and local candidates, and to prohibit broadcasters from adopting blanket bans on the sale of airtime to state and local candidates.

The Commission said it welcomed other suggestions and ideas about broadcaster public interest responsibilities not contained in the NOI and requested that parties articulate legal theories for their proposals.

Action by the Commission December 15, 1999, by Notice of Inquiry (FCC 99-390). Chairman Kennard, Commissioners Ness and Tristani, Commissioner Furchtgott-Roth concurring in part and dissenting in part, and Commissioner Powell concurring, with Commissioners Furchtgott-Roth, Powell and Tristani issuing separate statements.

- FCC -

MM Docket No. 99-360

Mass Media Bureau Contact: Eric Bash (202) 418-2130; TTY (202) 418-1169